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Israelis Building Barrier in Canal

War Was Hinted

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A Central Intelligence Agency report late in September warned the White House of a strong possibility that war might soon break out in the Middle East, according to reliable sources.

The CIA evaluation, based mostly on unusually large Egyptian maneuvers near the Suez Canal, did not go so far as to predict flatly that an invasion was certain.

But the signs were viewed as sufficiently ominous to be immediately passed along at very high level to the Israelis.

Tel Aviv, however, reportedly disputed the American interpretation of Egyptian activity. Given the high esteem in which Israeli intelligence is held in Washington and the closeness of the Israelis to the would-be war zone, the Israeli assessment was quickly accepted here.

As late as Oct. 4, just two days before the war began, the joint U.S. Intelligence Board, made up of representatives from several intelligence agencies — including CIA—took a common position that hostilities were unlikely, according to informants here.

The readiness to accept the Israeli view, the failure to heed some unusual danger signals and the general surprise of the Arab attack has caused considerable post-war concern both within the administration and the intelligence community.

Within the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, it has been learned that the three top men—an Army colonel, Navy captain and senior civilian official—who headed the Middle East intelligence branch were transferred out of those jobs in the aftermath of the fighting.

At the same time, however, the existence of the earlier CIA warning, roughly one to two weeks before the fighting started, seems to suggest that the intelligence community was not totally as flat-footed at Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger often suggested at his Oct. 25 press conference.

At that time, Kissinger said under questioning that "... all the intelligence at our disposal (before Oct. 6) and all the intelligence given to us by foreign countries suggested that there was no possibility of the outbreak of a war."

Sources say there is no question that in the period between the end of September — after the Israelis had challenged the CIA warning—and just a day or so before the war actually started, the United States had accepted the Israeli view that "they knew best" and there was no cause for alarm.

But Kissinger's assertion that the intelligence available suggested "no possibility of the outbreak of a war" is regarded by a number of senior officials both in and out of the intelligence field as an overstatement at the very least.

Aside from the CIA report, sources here suggest that other parts of the intelligence community such as the State Department, while not making outright predictions of warfare, were certainly expressing wariness.

The most difficult, and some say impossible, part of intelligence work, however, is the difference between gathering facts and estimating intentions. It is this difference that Kissinger sought to emphasize at an earlier Oct. 12 press conference when he was questioned about the apparent intelligence failure in not predicting the attack.

Kissinger said then that both U.S. and Israeli intelligence had been aware of the pre-war build-up of forces in Egypt and Syria. He explained that Egyptian army maneuvers on the west side of the Suez Canal had been carried out during September in each of the last 10 years. He indicated that three times during the week preceding the war, assessments had been asked from U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies and that each time they concluded that "hostilities were unlikely to the point of there being no chance of it."

Yet the earlier CIA report, which informants say was contained in the more highly classified reports that come to the attention of only certain officials, reportedly warned that the September maneuvers this year were different and more ominous than the past.

Informants say there were many more troops involved than in the past, more ammunition being used and stockpiled, a much greater logistics build-up and, perhaps most importantly, more field communications being hooked up and operated—something which occasionally can be listened in on by electronic sensors.

The transfer of officials within the Defense Intelligence Agency, according to one source, came about because of some strong objections voiced by these officials before the war started to the validity of these danger signals.

At his Oct. 12 press conference, Kissinger alluded to the "gravest danger of intelligence assessments". . .the tendency to "fit the facts into existing preconceptions and to make them consistent with what is anticipated."

By and large, the prevailing view since the 1967 war had been that the Arab armies would never risk another humiliating defeat at the hands of Israel.

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